Japan police investigate cause of blast in Sapporo

world

Large blast and fire wrecked a restaurant in Sapporo

Officials warned that the number of injured could rise

AFP | Tokyo

apanese police were investigating yesterday the cause of a powerful blast that ripped through a restaurant in the country's north overnight, injuring 42 people and damaging surrounding buildings.

The explosion in the city of Sapporo on Sunday night started fires and caused the partial collapse of some neighbouring buildings, forcing dozens of residents into shelters, officials said.

The cause of the blast was still under investigation, police said, may have been a gas leak.

Some reports said fumes were been collected for disposal at a rising in the night air, with witreal estate company in the building.

But investigators were also looking into at least nine propane tanks installed in the building for the various businesses located inside.



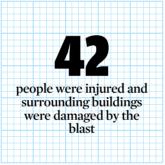
Firefighters attend the scene in Sapporo

Numerous customers at the restaurant on the building's first floor said they smelled gas at the but there were reports that it time of the explosion, Kyodo News agency reported.

The blast produced large leaking from spray cans that had flames and sent plumes of smoke nesses describing a terrifying boom.

The two-story wooden building, which also housed a clinic, was seriously damaged, a Sapporo fire department official told AFP.

injured, but there were no fatal-



Police said 42 people had been ities. Among the injured were building to escape, breaking her told AFP.

leg in the process. looked up at the sky it was filled but they had not made progress," with plumes of smoke," an el- he said. derly woman said in footage on public broadcaster NHK.

"The ceiling fell, then the entire second floor collapsed and from wood and are vulnerable we were all stuck. We managed to fires.

to escape after everyone kicked through the wall," a person who was in the restaurant at the time told Kvodo.

The fire from the blast spread to neighbouring buildings, and debris blasted out by the explosion shattered the windows of nearby apartments and restaurants, according to local reports.

"We are investigating details about the damage together with police at the scene," the fire department official said.

The blast happened around 8.30 pm (1130 GMT), and the city government opened a shelter to house dozens of people whose homes were damaged.

The explosion also caused a temporary black-out, with 250 buildings losing electricity, but power was later restored, he said.

The three tenants in the buildseveral children, as well as a ing were poorly prepared for man who suffered burns and a possible fires, Sapporo fire dewoman who jumped from the partment official Takashi Shida

"We instructed them to im-"There was an enormous prove these points during an sound, 'bang', then when I on-site inspection in October

> Many small and medium-sized older buildings in Japan are built partly or entirely

Erdogan vows to 'remove' Kurd militia east of Euphrates



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan addresses his supporters in Konya, Turkey AFP | Ankara

President Recep Tayy-ip Erdogan yesterday vowed Turkey would remove a Kurdish militia viewed as terrorists by Ankara from northern Syria if the US failed to ensure fighters leave the east of the Euphrates.

The threat comes after Erdogan spoke on the phone with US President Donald Trump on Friday when the pair agreed to ensure "more effective coordination" between their countries' operations in Syria.

The conversation followed threats from Erdogan last week to launch an offensive against the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia east of the Euphrates River, where there are American troops, within the "next few days".

"I spoke with Trump. The terrorists must leave the east of the Euphrates. If they don't go, we will remove them," Erdogan promised during a televised speech in the central Turkish province of Konya.

Wife of detained China activist goes bald



to police, which have been sent back unanswered.

In April, Li attempted to march 100 kilometres (60 miles) to a detention facility in neigh-

Thailand seizes 18 million meth pills



Yuan Shanshan, left, Liu Ermin, Wang Qiaoling and Li Wenzu pose shaved their heads to protest the detention of their husbands, detained during the so-caled 709 crackdown

AFP | Beijing

The wife of a detained Chi- ing the premises. I nese lawyer and three supto a Beijing court a petition pro- -- are homonyms. testing her husband's indefinite detention.

Hongsecun People's High Court on July 9, 2015. in south Beijing in a symbolic of the country.

"We can go bald, but the courtroom critics of Communist country cannot be lawless," the authorities. four women shouted outside

porters shaved their heads ves- completely bald and having a crackdown" who is vet to be terday and attempted to submit state of lawlessness -- "wufa"

geted during a sweeping crack- a proper explanation," his wife The four women went to the down on activists and lawyers Li Wenzu told AFP.

Attorney Wang Quanzhang, authorities aren't following due protest against what they said who defended political activists process. I want to know why titioners of the banned Falun highlighted the "lawlessness" and victims of land seizures, dis- they aren't allowing the family's Gong spiritual movement, was appeared in the sweep aimed at lawyer to visit Wang," she said. released on bail pending trial in

Charged in January 2016 with freedom of information requests lawyers.

the courthouse after they were alleged "subversion of state prevented by police from enter- power", Wang is the only one of over 200 lawyers and activists tivist Zhai Yanmin, said she was The Chinese words for being arrested in the so-called "709 tried or released.

Their husbands were all tar- tained incommunicado without surveillance," she said.

"I want answers as to why the Yanyi. Li said over the past three January 2017. He has since shed years she has submitted over 30 light on the torture of detained

bouring Tianjin to highlight her husband's plight before she was thwarted by police.

"I want to urge the Supreme People's Court to perform its supervisory duties and investigate why the second intermediate court in Tianiin that is handling my husband's case is dragging its feet." Li said.

"The court has surpassed the time limit prescribed by law for dealing with such cases," she said.

Health concerns

Liu Ermin, wife of rights acprotesting her husband's torture while in detention.

"His health has deteriorated "My husband is being de- and we are still under constant

The third woman was Yuan Shanshan, wife of lawyer Xie

Xie, who defended prac-

Attempts to crack down the methamphetamine trade in Thailand have resulted in massive seizures and left at least 15 alleged smugglers shot dead in the country's north since the start of November

AFP | Bangkok

pills in the drug-riddled "Gold- start of November. en Triangle", a senior military

tersecting China, Myanmar, cars.

Thailand and Laos -- is the

the drug's influx into Thai- live on Facebook.

land have resulted in massive seizures and left at least 15 al-Thai authorities seized leged smugglers shot dead in **L** more than 18 million meth the country's north since the

The latest bust occurred in official said yesterday, follow- Chiang Rai province on Suning deadly anti-trafficking op- day night after authorities reerations in the border region. ceived a tip-off that smugglers The Golden Triangle -- a were active in the area, later lawless wedge of land in- pinpointing two suspicious

"We found and seized bags... main base of operations for all were methamphetamine, Southeast Asia's highly lucra- about 18.76 million pills," comtive methamphetamine trade. mander Vichit Wongsang said Attempts to crack down on in a press conference streamed